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In the Supreme Court of the United States

OCTOBER TERM, 1948

No. 583

**LOUIS A. REILLY, AS POSTMASTER OF THE CITY OF
NEWARK, IN THE COUNTY OF ESSEX AND STATE OF
NEW JERSEY, PETITIONER**

v.

**JOSEPH J. PINKUS, TRADING AS AMERICAN HEALTH
AIDS COMPANY, ALSO KNOWN AS ENERGY FOOD
CENTER**

**PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE
UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE
THIRD CIRCUIT**

The Solicitor General, on behalf of the United States, prays that a writ of certiorari issue to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, entered in the above-entitled case on October 25, 1948.

OPINIONS BELOW

The opinions of the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey (R. 46-51, 59-62) are reported at 61 F. Supp. 610 and 71 F. Supp. 993. The opinion of the United States Court of

Appeals for the Third Circuit (R. 68-74) is reported at 170 F. 2d 786.

JURISDICTION

The judgment of the Court of Appeals was entered on October 25, 1948 (R. 76). By order of the Court dated January 17, 1949, time within which to file this petition for certiorari was extended to and including February 21, 1949. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U. S. C. 1254(1).

QUESTION PRESENTED

Whether the Postmaster General lacked power to base findings, on which a fraud order was issued, on the testimony of expert medical witnesses.

STATUTE INVOLVED

R. S. 3929, as amended, 39 U. S. C. 259, provides in pertinent part:

The Postmaster General may, upon evidence satisfactory to him * * * that any person or company is conducting any * * * scheme or device for obtaining money or property of any kind through the mails by means of false or fraudulent pretenses, representations, or promises, instruct postmasters at any post office at which registered letters or any other letters or mail matter arrive directed to any such person or company * * * to return all such mail matter to the postmaster at the office at which it was originally mailed, with the word "Fraudulent" plainly written or stamped upon the outside thereof * * *.

R. S. 4041, as amended, 39 U. S. C. 732, provides in pertinent part:

The Postmaster General may, upon evidence satisfactory to him that any person or company * * * is conducting any * * * scheme for obtaining money or property of any kind through the mails by means of false or fraudulent pretenses, representations, or promises, forbid the payment by any postmaster to said person or company of any postal money orders drawn to his or its order * * * and may provide by regulation for the return to the remitters of the sums named in such money orders.

STATEMENT

Respondent, sole owner of a business in Newark, New Jersey, conducted under the trade name of "American Health Aids Company," is engaged in selling through the mails an obesity treatment called "Dr. Phillips' Kelp-I-Dine Reducing Plan" (R. 14, 15).¹ The treatment is widely advertised in newspapers and magazines, and by means of radio broadcasting (R. 15, 19). In one form or another, all of these advertisements represent that respondent's obesity treatment provides a safe, quick, easy, and harmless method of losing from

¹ Kelp-I-Dine is a Pacific kelp or dried seaweed. Chemical analysis in evidence before the Postmaster General on the fraud order hearing showed that one-half teaspoonful of this kelp contains .4 milligram of iodine and small quantities of other minerals (R. 15).

3 to 5 pounds a week, without the use of exercise or drugs (R. 16-21, 28-35). The essence of the treatment offered is the taking of a half teaspoonful of Kelp-I-Dine with any meal, "preferably at breakfast" (R. 16, 17, 19, 20, 21). The various advertisements, in one striking form or another (R. 28-35), state that the treatment permits the purchaser to eat as he usually does, to eat plenty, and does not require cutting out fatty, starchy or rich foods, although the purchaser is advised to "cut down" on such foods (R. 16, 17, 18, 19, 22). The treatment is represented as a "scientific and guaranteed plan for reducing," approved by doctors (R. 19). Kelp-I-Dine is represented as a safe means of losing weight even if the purchaser suffer from diabetes, rheumatism "or any other ailment" (R. 19). Kelp-I-Dine is also represented as a means of satisfying "hidden hunger" in two ways: (1) By containing the minerals (including essential iodine) that satisfy such hidden hunger (R. 20); and (2) by adding bulk and giving a feeling of fullness (R. 21). The purchaser of respondent's treatment receives a 2 ounce container of Kelp-I-Dine and a "suggested menu for one day" entitled "Dr. Phillips' Kelp-I-Dine Reducing Plan."

A memorandum of charges dated November 23, 1944, was issued against respondent by the Post Office Department, directing him to show cause why a fraud order should not be issued (R. 14). This memorandum charged that the above-de-

scribed treatment for obesity constituted a scheme for obtaining money through the mails by means of false and fraudulent pretenses, representations and promises in violation of 39 U. S. C. 259 and 732 (R. 14). The hearing on the show cause order was continued from December 15, 1944, until January 10, 1945 (R. 14).² The respondent appeared in person and was represented by counsel (R. 14).

The findings of fact, pursuant to which the fraud order here involved was issued, were based solely upon the medical testimony of the expert witnesses appearing on behalf of the Government and the respondent at this hearing (R. 25). Two doctors testified as expert medical witnesses for the Government, one, the senior medical officer of the Food and Drug Administration, the other a physician of Washington, D. C., who is also a professor of medicine at the Schools of Medicine at George Washington University and Georgetown University (R. 22). Respondent offered the testimony of a physician from Newark, New Jersey (R. 22).

The medical testimony is analyzed in the memorandum prepared by the Solicitor of the Post Office Department (R. 22-25). Briefly summarized, such

² Hearings were held on January 10, 11, and 13 and February 1, 1945. Plaintiff took advantage of the opportunity to present his witnesses and to cross-examine the Government's witnesses. The transcript of the proceedings before the Post Office Department, covering 354 pages, is printed in a separate volume as part of the record herein (R. II 3-227). Reference to the second volume of the record will be made to R. II.

testimony showed that kelp was valueless in the treatment of obesity, and that any loss of weight resulting from "Dr. Phillips' Kelp-I-Dine Reducing Plan" was caused by the severe restriction on daily caloric intake prescribed by respondent's plan in his suggested daily diet (R. 23).

As to the kelp itself, the evidence established that its only value was in supplying a possible "nutritional supplement for increasing daily intake of iodine from ocean vegetation,"³ and that the sole purpose of such an intake would be to prevent iodine deficiency diseases, a precaution necessary only in certain limited areas of the country (R. 23).⁴ Respondent's medical expert admitted that his testimony with regard to the effectiveness of Kelp-I-Dine and the Dr. Phillips' plan was based on the report of another doctor which did not express his own opinion upon the subject (R. 23). His own test of Kelp-I-Dine was limited to putting some in his mouth and swallowing it with water (R. 23). Although testifying that kelp was an "anti-fat for reducing," he admitted that he had never prescribed it for such purpose and knew of no doctor who had (R. 23). He further admitted

³ Respondent claimed no more than this as to the nature of kelp on the label which, under the approval of the Food and Drug Administration, was placed on packages of Kelp-I-Dine (R. 22, 23).

⁴ Medical testimony clearly showed that iodine or other mineral deficiency diseases do not produce obesity, and that sufferers from such diseases may be underweight or overweight (R. 24).

that he had never heard of anyone who had reduced while taking kelp (R. 24). To the extent that salts of iodine were used in the treatment of obesity, he stated that the ordinary dosage would be "one gram three times a day" (R. 23). The daily intake of iodine from the Kelp-I-Dine prescribed by respondent would be .4 milligram, a milligram being one-thousandth of a gram (R. 23).

As noted above, the evidence clearly established that any loss of weight resulting from respondent's treatment was caused by the diet plan which he prescribed. The medical testimony showed that the average American sustaining diet contains in excess of 2,000 calories a day and that the diet of the obese ordinarily contains a considerably greater caloric intake (R. 23). All of the medical testimony was to the effect that obesity is ordinarily caused by overeating, although in some cases there may be other contributing conditions (R. 24). The daily diet prescribed by respondent provides about 1,000 calories per day (R. 23). Both the Government's witnesses and respondent's expert agreed that the diet so prescribed was severe and the Government's witnesses further testified that a person following such a rigid diet would experience the discomforts and strain of hunger, particularly if accustomed to overeating (R. 23-24). The testimony established that reduction in weight which would be caused by respondent's diet would vary in extent in various patients; that the diet might

effect the loss of three pounds per week but would not ordinarily do so (R. 24). The Government's experts further testified that the taking of a daily dose of one-half teaspoonful of kelp would not reduce such hunger in any way, either by adding bulk or by any other effect (R. 23, 24). All three medical witnesses agreed that treatment for obesity should be individualized and be prescribed only after diagnosis (R. 24). The testimony showed that the loss of as much as three pounds a week on a restricted diet might well be harmful; further, that a severe diet, such as that prescribed by respondent, might even produce serious results in patients with chronic diseases, particularly of the heart and kidneys (R. 24).

Viewing the obesity treatment which respondent held out in the light of the above testimony, the Post Office Department concluded that a purchaser of respondent's treatment was led to believe that Kelp-I-Dine was a valuable product for the treatment of obesity, and was not given notice that he was merely purchasing a recommended diet considered rigid and severe. On the testimony it was found that none of the other representations made by respondent could be sustained: The purchaser would not be able to "eat plenty" or as he usually did; would not be able to reduce to the extent promised by respondent even if he followed the severe diet, which might be harmful if not scientifically indicated in his particular case; and that,

in any event, he would experience hunger, discomfort and strain inasmuch as the testimony established that kelp is valueless for the purpose offered, containing nothing that would prevent or satisfy the hunger incident to following a rigid diet (R. 24-25). A finding was accordingly made that respondent was engaged in conducting a scheme for obtaining money through the mails by means of fraudulent representations and promises, in violation of 39 U. S. C. 259 and 732, as averred in the memorandum of charges (R. 26). A fraud order was issued on May 7, 1945 (R. 12-13).⁵

Respondent instituted this litigation on June 1, 1945, by the filing of a complaint seeking to enjoin the Postmaster General and the Postmaster of the City of Newark from enforcing the fraud order (R. 3-11). Simultaneously, respondent obtained an order to show cause, returnable June 11, 1945, why an order should not be entered enjoining the named defendants from enforcing the fraud order (R. 43). On June 11, 1945, a hearing was held on the order to show cause, and on motions to quash service and to dismiss as to the Postmaster General and the Postmaster of Newark (R. 1, 44, 45). The district judge rendered his opinion on July 18, 1945 (R. 46). He first disposed of questions raised as to indispensable parties, grant-

⁵ During the course of this litigation, the fraud order was limited by the Postmaster General so as to be applicable only to the American Health Aids Company, and its officers and agents as such, at Newark, New Jersey (R. 70).

ing the motion to quash service as to the Postmaster General but denying the motion to dismiss as to the Postmaster (R. 46-49). Passing to the merits, he ordered a permanent injunction against the Postmaster forbidding him to carry into effect the fraud order issued by the Postmaster General (R. 51).⁶ At the time of this holding that respondent was entitled to permanent injunctive relief, the district judge had before him only the complaint (R. 3-12) and three exhibits, consisting of the fraud order itself and the Solicitor's memorandum (R. 12-26), a copy of a "Typical Suggested Kelp-I-Dine Diet" (R. 26-27), and excerpts from some medical dictionaries (R. 36-42). No answer had then been filed nor was any copy of the transcript of the proceedings before the Postmaster General outside of Washington, D. C. The district judge nevertheless held that a " * * * careful examination of the Solicitor's memorandum and of all the evidence adduced at the hearing * * *" led to the conclusion that there was insufficient evidence from which the Postmaster General could have found " * * * actual fraud in fact on the part of the plaintiff * * *" (R. 50). This review of the evidence, he stated, " * * * showed a divergence of opinion as to the effectiveness of the Kelpidine reducing plan and of the

⁶ The permanent injunction thus ordered was later modified to a preliminary injunction pending the further order of the district court (R. 59, 51-54).

inherent values of kelp as employed therein * * *," citing *School of Magnetic Healing v. McAnnulty*, 187 U. S. 94 (R. 50). Again referring to the *Magnetic Healing* case, the district judge stated his view that the remedy whereby harmful advertising should be reached lies in "* * * other fields than those governed by postal regulations * * *," and can be better solved "* * * by supervising agencies within the actual scope of medical control and by export [sic] regulation, than by more or less arbitrary prohibition by the Post Office Department" (R. 50-51).

On October 2, 1945, an answer was filed, the transcript of the proceedings before the Post Office Department being made a part thereof (R. 54-57). Thereafter, a motion for summary judgment was made on behalf of the Postmaster (R. 58). By opinion dated June 5, 1947, this motion was denied (R. 59-62). The district judge held that "further examination" of all the evidence led him to the same conclusion as that originally reached at the hearing on the motion for a preliminary injunction (R. 60). Again referring to the *Magnetic Healing* case, the district judge held an injunction warranted on the ground that the fraud order had been issued in a case "* * * not within his jurisdiction * * *" (R. 60). The court held that this lack of power necessarily followed from the fact that the findings underlying the fraud order were "based only upon the medi-

cal testimony of the expert witnesses" (R. 61), and that such findings as to the " * * * effectiveness of the plan, the severity of the diet, and the inherent values of kelp as employed in the kelpidine plan, are not such matters * * * as are subject of proof as an ordinary fact * * * " (R. 61).

Subsequent to this opinion, a motion for summary judgment made by respondent was granted (R. 62-64). On appeal, the judgment of the district court was affirmed on October 25, 1948 (R. 76), one judge dissenting (R. 74-76).

SPECIFICATION OF ERRORS TO BE URGED

The court below erred:

1. In failing to hold that the issuance of the fraud order was based on substantial evidence.
2. In holding that the Postmaster General lacked power to base findings, in support of a fraud order, on the testimony of medical expert witnesses.
3. In failing to reverse the district court judgment and order the proceeding dismissed.

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT

1. The court below conceded that court review of the issuance of a fraud order " * * * extends no further than to determine whether there is substantial factual evidence to support the Postmaster General's conclusion * * * " (R. 73), but thought

that under *School of Magnetic Healing v. McAnnulty*, 187 U. S. 94, the issuance of such an order could not be based upon the opinion evidence of medical expert witnesses, at least where there was a conflict of opinion, but only upon factual proof as to the value of a product—by which apparently was meant specific scientific tests and experiments conducted by the witness. But *Leach v. Carlile*, 258 U. S. 138, indicates that the *Magnetic Healing* case cannot be regarded as standing for any such broad proposition. In any event, there was no real conflict of opinion as to material matters in the instant case.

The court limited *Leach v. Carlile* by confining it to cases where the alleged medical fraud consisted of a claim, by advertising or otherwise, that the product or scheme offered for sale constituted a “* * * panacea or cure-all article * * *” (R. 72). Since the fraud here charged consisted of a scheme of specific deception, the court thought the *Magnetic Healing* case, not *Leach v. Carlile*, controlling (R. 71-72).⁷

⁷ The court does not indicate the basis for the sharp distinction thus drawn between the legal vulnerability of a fraudulent scheme to sell a panacea and a fraudulent scheme to sell a specific medicine or cure. Moreover, the distinction clearly misapprehends the meaning to be attached to “panacea” as that word was used in the Court’s opinion in *Leach v. Carlile*. “Panacea” refers to any scheme which exaggerates the efficacy of a product beyond the range of permissible difference of opinion, rather than to a cure-all. So understood, the term readily characterizes the nature of respondent’s claim herein.

We submit that the analysis by the court below of the *Magnetic Healing* case and *Leach v. Carlile*, and its limitation of the rule as to judicial review in fraud order cases, are plainly erroneous. To the extent that the *Magnetic Healing* case states a special rule of review for cases involving the vending of medical schemes and cures, it should be confined to areas of medical knowledge where the decision of the issue presented rests on considerations too problematical and controversial to be considered as proof of any sort. This is not such a case. The decision is entirely inapplicable where, as here, the expert testimony is based on scientific facts and knowledge which have become generally accepted through the advance of medical science. In the latter type of case, judicial sanction should not be given to an interpretation of the *Magnetic Healing* doctrine contended for by all defendants in proceedings to reach fraudulent merchandising of medicines and cures, namely, that the doctrine requires the automatic elimination from consideration of all medical opinion testimony.

Leach v. Carlile, setting forth the usual rule of review, should control the disposition of this case. Purchasers of respondent's obesity treatment were led to believe that they could achieve drastic reductions in weight by taking a half teaspoonful of Kelp-I-Dine with meals, "preferably at breakfast," and that no discomfort or danger was in-

volved in the plan. The evidence established that, in fact, the Kelp-I-Dine so prescribed was valueless for reducing purposes and that any reduction in weight which followed the purchase of respondent's plan was achieved by an extremely rigorous restriction of daily caloric intake, a restriction to the point of danger in purchasers with chronic diseases, particularly of the heart and kidneys. There was, in fact, no substantial disagreement among the medical expert witnesses on the important points involved at the hearing. The medical witness offered by respondent agreed with the Government's witnesses that obesity is ordinarily caused by overeating, although in some cases there may be other contributing conditions; that the diet prescribed by respondent's plan was severe; and that treatment for obesity should be individualized and prescribed only after diagnosis (R. 24). He admitted that his testimony with regard to the effectiveness of Kelp-I-Dine and the obesity plan did not express his own opinion but was based on the report of another doctor; that his own test of Kelp-I-Dine was limited to putting some in his mouth and swallowing it with water; that he had never prescribed Kelp-I-Dine for reducing and knew of no doctor who had; that he had never heard of anyone who had reduced while taking kelp; and that, to the extent iodine salts were used in the treatment of obesity, a prescription would be one gram three times a day whereas the daily intake of iodine

from Kelp-I-Dine as prescribed by respondent was .4 milligram, a milligram being one-thousandth of a gram (R. 23).⁸

There is no scope for a proper application of the *Magnetic Healing* case herein. Certainly, the mere availability to the defense on a charge of medical fraud of a cooperative medical witness cannot, in and of itself, suffice to invoke the automatic bar of the *Magnetic Healing* case and thereby block action necessary for consumer protection. Similar contentions have been vigorously rejected by courts in dealing with the same problem of review. *Todd v. F.T.C.*, 145 F. 2d 858 (C.A. D.C.); *Neff v. F.T.C.*, 117 F. 2d 495, 497 (C.A. 4); *Irwin v. F.T.C.*, 143 F. 2d 316, 323-324 (C.A. 8); *John J. Fulton Co. v. F.T.C.*, 130 F. 2d 85, 86 (C.A. 9), certiorari denied,

⁸ Respondent's medical witness had testified, on direct examination, that iodine in the system reduced weight by increasing metabolism and that Kelp-I-Dine would cause some weight reduction on account of its iodine content (R. II 174, 176). He admitted, on cross-examination, that he did not know the quantity of the ingredients in Kelp-I-Dine except that it contained a very small amount of iodine (R. II 185, 186, 189-193), which he stated to be .3 milligram. He further stated that the daily dose prescribed would consist of an iodine salt in the amount of 1 gram three times a day (R. II 192), a dosage "50 or 60 times" larger than that contained in the daily prescription of Kelp-I-Dine and in a different form, the Kelp-I-Dine containing not an iodine salt but direct or metallic iodine (R. II 192). Since, as indicated above, a milligram is one-thousandth of a gram, the disparity between the amount of metallic iodine contained in the daily dose of Kelp-I-Dine and three grams a day of an iodine salt is far greater than the difference indicated by this witness. He further stated that he had never given iodine to increase metabolism (R. II 197) and that he did not know how much Kelp-I-Dine in the prescribed dosage would increase metabolism, if at all (R. II 204, 207-208).

317 U.S. 679; *Justin Haynes & Co. v. F.T.C.*, 105 F. 2d 988, 989 (C.A. 2), certiorari denied, 308 U.S. 616; *United States v. Seven Jugs of Dr. Salisbury's Rakos*, 53 F. Supp. 746, 759 (D. Minn.)

Here, there is no need to disparage the qualifications or sincerity of the medical witness offered by the respondent at the Post Office Department hearing. That proceeding, in fact, brought to light no honest differences of opinion, no controversial schools of thought or any of the other indicia of lack of knowledge which might provide an occasion for the use of the doctrine of the *Magnetic Healing* case. On the contrary, the fraud order here involved was plainly supported by substantial evidence. The witnesses here agreed on the causes of obesity, the need for individualized treatment, the severity and danger of the diet involved and the lack of value of Kelp-I-Dine as a reducing factor. It is only by the total exclusion of medical expert testimony, without regard to the fact that such testimony in this case is based on established and universally accepted fact, that the result below was reached. The court below characterized all such evidence as "opinion evidence" solely for the purpose of invoking its rule of exclusion. We submit that this use of the *Magnetic Healing* case is improper. And there is no merit to the suggestion below that a different result might have been attained if the witnesses here involved had gone into a laboratory and performed specific experiments for the purpose of

the Post Office Department hearing. There would seem to be no purpose served in any case by performing such experiments to establish facts already generally accepted and not substantially controverted.⁹

2. The question is one of broad importance to all cases involving medical frauds. The substantial evidence rule, as the test of court review of the issuance of fraud orders, is also the rule governing review of cease and desist orders issued by the Federal Trade Commission. Similarly, the same question as to the validity of expert medical testimony comes up in proceedings brought by the Pure Food and Drug Administration. Both of these Departments, as well as the Post Office Department, have indicated to this Department their grave concern with the decision of the court below and have requested that review by this Court be sought.¹⁰

3. The lower courts have almost uniformly not regarded the *Magnetic Healing* decision as controlling in cases of this sort. The ruling below as

⁹ A chemical analysis of Kelp-I-Dine was, of course, made and placed in evidence before the Postmaster General on the fraud order herein (R. 15).

¹⁰ It should be noted that the decision below has been utilized in pending New Jersey cases as the basis for enjoining the enforcement of fraud orders. *Simon Bloom and Jeanette Bloom, Trading as World Wide Vitamin Company v. Reilly*, D. N.J., Civil Action No. 9143, decided January 14, 1949; *Pinkus, Trading as Spot Reducer Co. v. Reilly*, D. N.J., No. 11035, October 27, 1948; *Scientific Aids Company v. Kern*, D. N.J., Civil No. 11484, October 28, 1948.

to the worth of the type of evidence here involved is in conflict with the following decisions, in which findings based on medical opinion testimony were upheld despite the presence of conflicting testimony: *Justin Haynes & Co. v. F.T.C.*, 105 F. 2d 988, 989 (C.A. 2), certiorari denied, 308 U. S. 616; *Neff v. F.T.C.*, 117 F. 2d 495 (C.A. 4); *Aronberg v. F.T.C.*, 132 F. 2d 165, 169 (C.A. 7); *Dr. W. B. Caldwell v. F.T.C.*, 111 F. 2d 889, 891 (C.A. 7); *Irwin v. F.T.C.*, 143 F. 2d 316, 324 (C.A. 8); *John J. Fulton Co. v. F.T.C.*, 130 F. 2d 85, 86 (C.A. 9), certiorari denied, 317 U. S. 679; *Alberty v. F.T.C.*, 118 F. 2d 669, 670 (C.A. 9), certiorari denied, 314 U. S. 630; *J. E. Todd v. F.T.C.*, 145 F. 2d 858 (C.A. D. C.); *United States v. One Device*, 160 F. 2d 194, 198-199 (C.A. 10); *United States v. 7 Jugs of Dr. Salsbury's Rakos*, 53 F. Supp. 746, 757 (D. Minn.); cf. *Charles of the Ritz Dist. Corp. v. F.T.C.*, 143 F. 2d 676, 678-679 (C.A. 2); *Goodwin v. United States*, 2 F. 2d 200, 201 (C.A. 6); *Research Laboratories v. United States*, 167 F. 2d 410 (C.A. 9), certiorari denied, No. 134, this Term; *Seven Cases of Eckman's Alterative v. United States*, 239 U. S. 510, 518; *Cable v. Walker*, 152 F. 2d 23 (C.A. D. C.), certiorari denied, 328 U. S. 860; *Summers v. McCoy*, 163 F. 2d 1021 (C.A. 6), certiorari denied, 333 U. S. 855.¹¹

¹¹ See generally, *Warner's Renowned Remedies Co. v. F.T.C.*, 140 F. 2d 18 (C.A. D.C.), certiorari denied, 322 U. S. 754; *Associated Laboratories v. F.T.C.*, 150 F. 2d 629 (C.A. 2); *E. Griffiths Hughes v. F.T.C.*, 77 F. 2d 886, 887 (C.A. 2), certiorari denied, 296 U. S. 617.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, the Solicitor General prays that a writ of certiorari issue to review the judgment of the court below herein.

Respectfully submitted,

PHILIP B. PERLMAN,
Solicitor General.

MARCH 1949.